



Changing Governance at St. Mary's, Cogges

Like any organisation, St. Mary's, Cogges requires an effective governance structure to ensure that it is well run and that its finances are administered in an effective way. As part of the Church of England, there is a defined legal structure that defines how our governance is set up. However, this legal framework gives churches considerable freedom as to how these structures are implemented and operated, depending on their individual circumstances.

As a result of our rapid growth in the last few years, we have been reviewing the governance structures here at St. Mary's, Cogges and have concluded that a few changes are required to meet the needs of a larger church. This leaflet explains the legal structure and the changes that we are planning to implement from the Annual Parochial Church Meeting on Tuesday 20th February.

THE PARISH SYSTEM

A parish is the geographical area committed to the care of an incumbent (usually vicar) or parish priest by the Bishop. So everyone in England lives in a parish, whether or not they attend the parish church.

The parish system developed gradually. By the end of the 13th century the country was covered by parishes which have been sub-divided as the population grew.

Each parish has two churchwardens (normally) and a Parochial Church Council (PCC).

PCCs were first given legal status in 1919. Prior to the legal recognition of PCCs, the administration and finances of the parish church were in the hands of the incumbent and churchwardens only, which gave scope for abuse or neglect, and often failed to use the skills and gifts of other members of the congregation.



CHURCHWARDENS

The office of Churchwarden is an ancient and venerable one within the Church of England. Churchwardens have a key role within the church with some significant responsibilities. Technically, they are the bishop's representatives; practically they are a crucial part of the leadership structure of the church, outworked primarily through regular interaction with the vicar, staff team and ministry leaders along with full membership of the PCC. Churchwardens are, in effect, "spiritual elders" in the life of the church and carry significant authority and responsibility. In practical terms, many of their duties are now shared with the PCC and staff team.

We have two churchwardens who are elected annually at the Meeting of Parishioners, held immediately before the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

In summary, the PCC exists to co-operate with the vicar in sharing leadership of the parish so that we may all:

- Play our part in God's mission and ministry in this place.
- Steward our buildings and churchyard for the furtherance of God's kingdom.
- Contribute to the wider life of the Church of England.
- Conduct ourselves in ways which fulfil best practice in safeguarding, finance, and employment.

Membership

PCC members are elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting which is normally held in February. Members are elected for 3 years. All clergy licensed to the parish, the churchwardens, and any members of the deanery, diocesan or general synods on the electoral roll are ex officio on the PCC.

Responsibilities

The PCC's powers and duties are defined by certain Acts of Parliament and other legislation, principally the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956. It states: 'It shall be the duty of the incumbent and the Parochial Church Council to consult together on matters of general concern and importance in the parish.'

The PCC has the following functions:

- Co-operation with the vicar in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.
- The consideration and discussion of matters concerning the Church of England or any other matters of religious or public interest, but not the declaration of the doctrine of the Church on any question.
- Making known and putting into effect any provisions made by the diocesan synod or the deanery synod, but without prejudice to the powers of the council on any particular matter.
- Giving advice to the diocesan synod and the deanery synod on any matter referred to the council.
- Raising such matters as the council consider appropriate with the diocesan synod or deanery synod.

It exists to enable the church to play its part in God's mission to his world.

This often surprises people. They think the PCC is about looking after the fabric of the church, or keeping the books. But the first stated purpose is about mission, and suggests a model of co-operation between the vicar and the PCC. This is about helping a church fulfil its purpose, to keep before a church why it exists. Just as PCCs can easily lose their sense of purpose, so too can churches. On behalf of the church a PCC constantly grapples with the questions of 'Why does this church exist?' and 'Where is God leading us at this time as we seek to fulfil Christ's mission and ministry in this area?' Such mission planning involves an up-to-date and active parish mission plan, which asks and answers the following questions: (i) What is the mission of God in our parish? (ii) What ministries do we need for this mission? (iii) What resources do we need for these ministries?



It exists to co-operate with the vicar in sharing leadership.

Again, this often surprises people. Sometimes people's experience of a PCC has led them to think they exist to frustrate everything the vicar wants to do. Others' experience suggests it exists to rubber-stamp whatever the vicar wants to do. But it exists to co-operate with the vicar, to work alongside in sharing responsibility for discerning how it will enable the church to be about God's mission and ministry in that place. The vicar isn't the head of the church, nor any other member of the PCC. Jesus is the head of his Church, and the vicar and PCC together are called to take their lead from Jesus. Jesus sets the agenda for his people, and the PCC and vicar are tasked with the process of discerning what this might be at this time in the life of a church, and how it might be lived out. However, the incumbent also has some unique responsibilities in the life of the church, including the 'cure of souls in this parish', which mean there is a 'buck stops here' element to the incumbent's role.

It exists to ensure legal compliance with charity law and ecclesiastical law, in particular in the areas of safeguarding, finance, employment and appointments.

PCC members are trustees of a charity and therefore under obligation to fulfil charity law with due care to governance guidelines. Whilst this should not be seen as overly burdensome, it is important that PCC members understand their duty of care. Key areas here are safeguarding, financial oversight (including receiving regular financial updates; ensuring procedures exist to appropriately approve payments and that all cheques are signed by two authorised PCC members (or other persons authorised by the PCC); ensuring that the service offertories and other monies are appropriately supervised; generating the Annual Report and Accounts and submitting these documents to the APCM for approval), health and safety, disability, insurance, risk assessment, data protection, and acting as a good employer of any paid workers.

It exists to care for the buildings and churchyard so that they may be best suited for the purpose of the church's ministry and mission.

The PCC is responsible for maintenance and repair of the church building, inside and out, especially work recommended by the inspecting architect in the Quinquennial (five-yearly) Report. The PCC looks after 'movable goods' e.g. chairs, rails, candlesticks, lectern, communion plate, vestments, and the upkeep of the churchyard and any buildings, trees or paths in it, and walls, fences or hedges around the churchyard. It is involved in any application to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) for a faculty (permission to effect a change to the church, or its contents, or the churchyard).

It exists to be a channel of consultation within the wider Church through its synodical structures on matters that affect the Church locally and nationally.

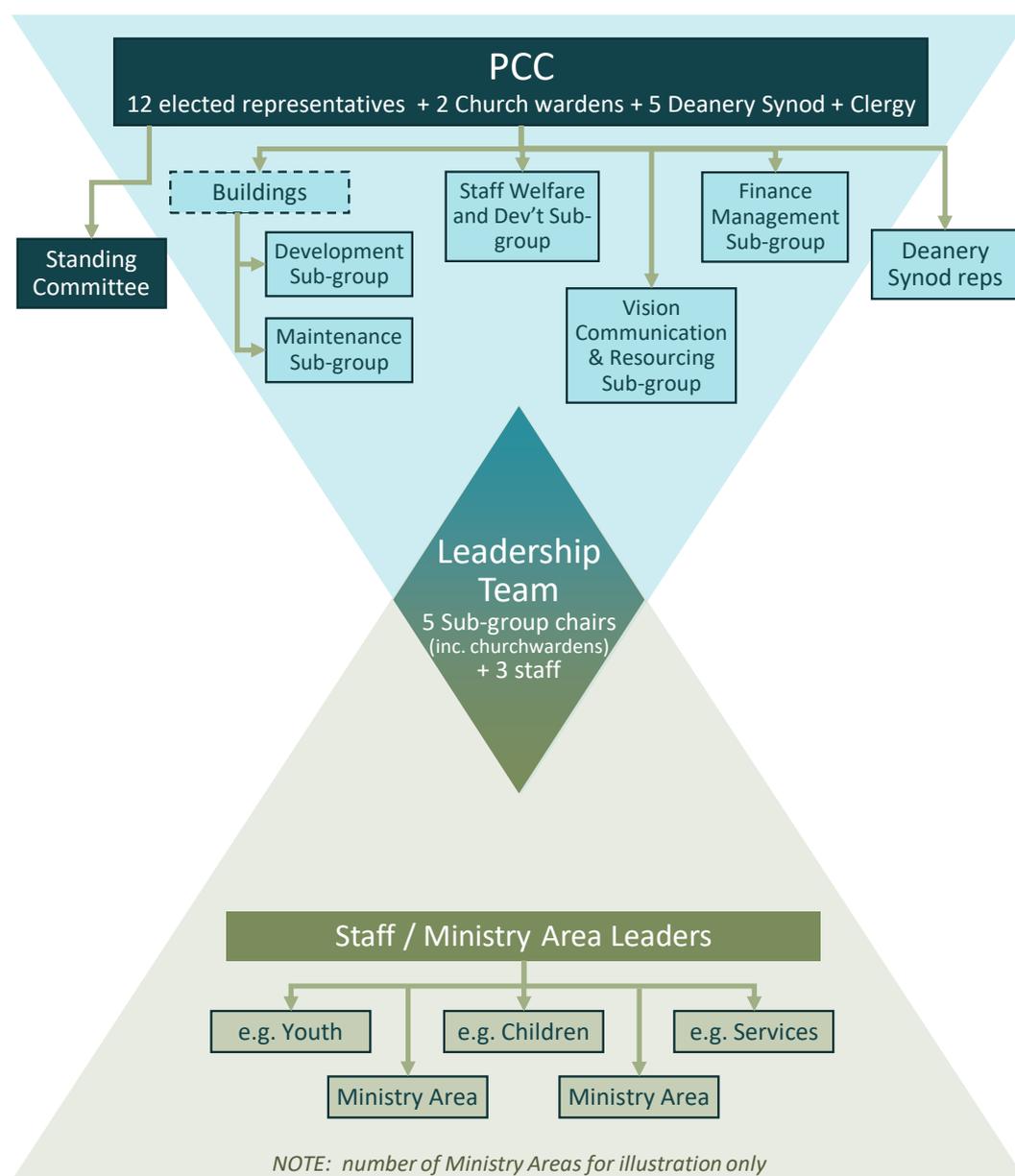
These structures were put in place to ensure a means by which the Church of England could 'talk' about important matters, enabling local churches to have a voice in wider Church issues, and decisions of the wider Church to be permeated down through the life of local churches.

WHY ARE WE CHANGING?

Historically, most major decisions affecting the church have been taken by the full PCC. Since the group was quite large and only met five times a year, decision-making tended to be quite slow and unwieldy. As the church has grown and we have added staff members, the pace at which things happen has increased, requiring many decisions to be made by the Standing Committee (a smaller group comprising the vicar, churchwardens and a small number of elected PCC members) between PCC meetings. Having reviewed the way in which things have been working, we concluded that it was time to introduce a more effective structure for the next phase of our church's growth.

A NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

With effect from the APCM, we are proposing to introduce a new governance structure as shown below:



The main changes are:

- Number of elected PCC representatives reduced from 15 to 12 to make full PCC meetings more effective. The full PCC will consider overall strategy and mission and review/approve proposals from the sub-groups.
- PCC sub-groups established to look strategically at five specific areas of church life for greater focus:
 - Buildings – Maintenance: to care for our existing buildings
 - Buildings – Development: to look at enhancing or adding to our facilities
 - Finance – Accounts Management: to ensure that our budget is well planned and spending is well managed
 - Vision Communication and Resourcing: to share the vision for our church with the congregation and ensure that the financial and other resources are available to fulfil it
 - Staff Welfare: to ensure that our staff are well managed and cared for
- A formal Leadership team comprising the vicar, curate, operations director, churchwardens and other PCC sub-group leaders.

These groups will provide the strategic direction for the staff team and ministries of the church in collaboration with the vicar.

JOINING THE PCC

The new PCC needs people with the right gifts, skills and passion to lead strategically in the areas described. If you think that this is you and are prepared to commit the time to serve God in this area, please download / pick up the separate leaflet for Prospective PCC Members and/or talk to Simon (Vicar), James/Gerry (Churchwardens) or Harvey (PCC Lay Chair) about what is involved.